
ENGLISH 345: WOMEN FILMMAKERS

ESSAY 2

LENGTH AND DUE DATE

Length: 5-6 pages, formatted as described in the "Assignments" portion of the syllabus

Due: Tuesday, June 8, by 10:00 p.m. via Collect It

ASSIGNMENT

For the essay, you will compare and contrast two films, writing on one of the following topics. In your essay, you will present an argument about the significance of the films' connections, and you will develop this argument by analyzing the thematic, ideological, narrative, and/or formal elements (mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound, etc.) of both films.

1. How do any two of the following films critique and/or offer alternatives to dominant representations of race, gender, and/or sexuality: *Autumn Moon*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Lost in Translation*, *Vagabond*, *The Watermelon Woman* or the films screened at SIFF?
2. Compare how two of the films screened during the past four weeks—*Autumn Moon*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Lost in Translation*, *Vagabond*, *The Watermelon Woman*—explore the concept of identity. What constitutes identity (history, relationships, gender, race, etc.)? Is identity inherent or constructed? Is it fixed or fluid? Note that you need not address all these questions; use them to consider your approach to the topic.
3. In *The Watermelon Woman* and *Vagabond*, characters offer multiple, sometimes conflicting, narratives of Fae's and Mona's identities. Compare how and why these films treat identity as a contested terrain.
4. *Autumn Moon* and *Lost in Translation* feature characters interacting within large, global metropolises. What is the relationship between the postmodern city and identity in these films?
5. Expand one of your postings on *Autumn Moon*, *Boys Don't Cry*, *Lost in Translation*, *Vagabond*, *The Watermelon Woman* or the films screened at SIFF to incorporate a comparison with one of the other listed films. If you choose this option, clear your topic with me, as not all posting questions will produce feasible topics for a longer essay.

GUIDELINES

1. Although I have provided questions, you will need to develop an angle of comparison/contrast. For example, one could approach the question regarding the concept of identity by examining how the selected films deconstruct the notion of an "authentic" identity. Other approaches could involve comparing how the films use found or fabricated images to create autobiography or analyzing how formal techniques convey the fluidity of characters' identities.
2. Effective comparison/contrast essays highlight how similarities and differences reveal something important about each film, the question, or the filmmaker(s). As you develop your essay, consider how each film "unlocks" the other. Ask yourself why it is important to examine these films together.
3. Rather than offering a catalogue of your observations regarding the films' similarities and differences, your essay should pose an argument about the significance of the connection. Your thesis should not simply state that "films X and Y treat issue Z similarly and differently."
4. While you can organize your comparison/contrast essay in several ways, you should avoid discussing one film in full, then turning to the other. This format relegates the

comparison/contrast to the second half of the paper. Instead, you can structure the first part of the body around similarities, moving from one film to the other, and the second part around differences, discussing each film in turn. You can also focus each paragraph on one similarity or difference, discussing examples from both films.

5. Although the comparison/contrast essay examines a large-scale question, close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to how the films address the topic through narrative and/or cinematic techniques. Focus on specific shots or scenes and the cinematic codes at work in those shots or scenes. You may also reference course readings to support your claims. When you quote, summarize, or paraphrase a source, please use MLA format. Please include a works cited list that lists the films and readings referenced in your essay.
6. Remember that you are writing to an audience who has already viewed the films. Therefore, your essay should not offer plot summaries. Instead, any reference to the films—dialogue quotations, scene descriptions, explanations of narrative movement—should support your analysis.
7. Do not forget the arguments posed in class, the course packet or the electronic posting area. A review of lecture notes, readings and postings on a particular film may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates or other authors.
8. You may incorporate screen shots into your analysis. However, you must explicate the image within the body of the essay rather than using screen shots as decorations. Identify and discuss the visual details that illustrate your claim about the films. When using screen shots, caption each image (for example, "Figure 1: Pui-Wai and Tokio send boats to sea during Mid-Autumn festival") and reference the figure number in your text (for example, "Tokio incorporates the Japanese tradition of sending off the spirits of the dead into the Chinese Mid-Autumn festival (see Figure 1). As they construct boats for the spirits to travel upon, Tokio and Pui-Wai create a hybrid identity that draws upon and transforms multiple rituals").
9. When describing a film's plot or stylistic techniques, use the present tense (for example, "Mona strides across a field," or "the seduction scene in *The Watermelon Woman* cuts from a shot of Diana and Cheryl kissing to a shot of a film that deals with racial passing").
10. If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me at [kgb\[at\]u\[dot\]washington\[dot\]edu](mailto:kgb[at]u[dot]washington[dot]edu) to set up an appointment.

GRADING

I will use an eighty-point grading rubric to evaluate the compare/contrast essay. Late essays will receive a 10-point deduction per day late, including weekends and holidays. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency.